

Syndication: More Than a Numbers Game

Seven years ago, the World Wrestling Federation and Jim Crockett's The Wrestling Network set ratings records for their nationally syndicated mat shows. The WWF, in one springtime weekend, achieved a combined rating of 12.6 for its action triad. Crockett's NWA trio rolled up a 9.8. But in 1994, not only have the fortunes fallen for wrestling syndication, the picture is potentially perilous.

MATWATCH '94

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Steve

BEVERLY

It's interesting after nearly seven years at this how wrestling newsletters and non-industry mat analysts continue to be regarded.

In the late 1980s, when bulletins had an explosion commensurate with the expansion of national interest in wrestling, we were all regarded as the most cancerous threat to the industry. Never mind that even the most successful of these bulletins was read by far fewer people than attended arena shows in a week (that's not always true today).

When Dave Meltzer was a columnist for *The National*, the valiant attempt at a daily national sports newspaper in the early '90s, he wrote about the Sting-Black Scorpion and Lex Luger-Ric Flair bouts at the September 1990 *Clash of the Champions* as being the most-watched matches in the history of cable television. Dave was screamed at by WWF personnel, exhorting him, "You shouldn't write that." Dave responded, "Why not? It's true." The Titan answer, "It doesn't matter. You shouldn't write that in a national paper."

Most of you know the legendary story toward the end of the original *Matwatch* when Ric Flair's attorney Dennis Guthrie sent me a registered letter, threatening me with a lawsuit if I didn't retract a quote from a WCW official concerning Flair. Never mind that between 90 and 100 per cent of the readers of *Matwatch* at the time stayed perpetually angry at the source of the quote and would jump in a bonfire if Flair told them it was advisable.

The even more interesting response is to independent wrestling hotlines, such as *The Real Wrestling Hotline*, of which Dave, Scott Hudson, Ron Lemieux and I are all associated. Our call counts don't even come close to matching our subscriber bases. But, boy, are we monitored!

The latest escapade involves a dispute over our 900 *Matwatch* report of Sept. 17 concerning the *Summer Slam* buy-rate.

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ANALYSIS

According to figures released in the Sept. 26 issue of *Variety*, mid-September ratings for the World Wrestling Federation network were a 5.8 while WCW's Wrestling Network stood at a 4.9.

As far as individual shows, the top-rated among the "big two" companies was the WWF's *Superstars of Wrestling* at a 1.6. That's less than half the rating of *Superstars* during a similar period covered in *Broadcasting* magazine in the fall of 1988.

WCW's flagship *Worldwide* was barely hovering at a 1.0, indicative of its weak status in New York, Chicago, Los Angeles, Boston and the San Francisco-Oakland market.

To place in perspective the significance of the figures, consider the following:

- ✓ The syndication figures for both organizations are consolidated totals of their three syndicated programs plus approximately 62 per cent of the combined ratings for their cable offerings.
- ✓ Syndicated programs of any kind are expected to draw at least a 3 rating and be seen in TV markets covering 70 per cent of the nation's viewers in order to attract national advertisers.
- ✓ Wrestling is on at least a limited "hit list" of shows advertisers steer clear of because of violence or controversy in content.
- ✓ Both Titan and Turner took substantial hits in both market losses and time periods in September and October because of ratings erosion, many in major cities.

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Syndication Disaster

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At their peaks, the WWF claimed more than 260 stations in the U.S. and Canada and WCW more than 190, though many of those were multiple stations in the same market. While a complete market list for Titan programs is not available for the current season, ad magazine forecasts were for the WWF to fall into the 160-170 station range with WCW down to 125-30, dropping perilously close to the 70 per cent floor range to sell adequate national advertising.

Sources close to the WWF—which will likely publicly dispute this claim—contend the Titan sales force dropped its prime upfront rate for a 30-second ad to \$25,000 this year, down from a high in the \$33,000-35,000 range. WCW, which—until the arrival of Hulk Hogan—historically has attracted far fewer children and teens (the strongest ad attraction for Titan), is reportedly selling in the \$14,000-17,000 range. Both companies have also reportedly offered makegood ads during the summer for underdelivery of projected audiences during the 1993-94 season, though Turner Program Services has been much more in debt to sponsors.

In an effort to beef up wrestling sales, Turner produced full page color ads in key television trade magazines, touting the arrival of Hulk Hogan and the name recognition he brings to WCW. The campaign has had little success in boosting syndication markets—or ratings. "No one should have expected it," says Dr. Steve Padgett, professor of broadcasting at Troy State (Ala.) University, who follows the ratings progress. "Those were ego ads, as much

"Hogan is rarely on the syndicated shows, aside from pre-taped interviews. That's hardly enough to convince a general manager to take a second look at the (WCW) shows."

Dr. Steve Padgett

as anything. Hogan is rarely even on the syndicated shows, except in short taped interviews and that's hardly enough to merit a general manager to take a second look at their shows."

Padgett says the World Wrestling Federation's "New WWF Generation" is also having little impact. "These companies need more than slogans to enliven their product with both the public and with advertisers," says Padgett.

When Turner first began selling its wrestling shows, to add incentives for stations to buy, the company required stations interested in Turner's colorized movie packages to take one hour of wrestling. The strategy resulted in approximately 30 new stations for WCW wrestling. During recent months, the Turner sales force was attempting to force a number of stations licensed for the company's CNN Newsource daily newsfeed to take an hour of wrestling in order to keep the feed. The ploy was not successful. The few stations which agreed consigned WCW product to overnight hours where audiences are virtually miniscule.

Among the major markets where both companies are hemorrhaging: New York, where WCW still clings to a weak 12:30 a.m. Sunday slot on WCBS; Chicago, where Titan was recently bounced from its long-traditional Saturday at 11 a.m. slot for *Superstars* to 12 midnight and from a 9 a.m. Sunday slot for *Challenge* to 3 a.m. and WCW continues mired on the market's weakest independent; San Francisco-Oakland, where the WWF at least temporarily has lost all television, and WCW is having to pay a weak independent to keep its *Worldwide* show on at 12:30 a.m. Sundays; Daytona Beach-Orlando, where the WWF has lost all TV except for *Spotlight*; Los Angeles, where WCW was recently forced on KTLA from a Saturdays at 10 a.m. slot to Mondays at 12:30 a.m.; Memphis, where the *Challenge* show airs after 1 a.m. Mondays on soon-to-be Fox affiliate WHBQ and WCW draws barely a 1 rating for *Worldwide* even with a Saturday at 11 a.m. schedule on independent WLMT.

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Steve Beverly

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We reported very early results from two major multi-system cable operators, which were forecasting a buy-rate between 0.85-0.9, lowest-ever for a *Summer Slam*. We were quick to preface this was a very preliminary report and we would not accept this as gospel until we heard what typically is the most reliable report, namely from the pay-per-view industry's trademark source, *Multichannel News*. Those disclaimers apparently weren't enough for the WWF.

Commonly known within the industry is how Titan's Howard Finkel monitors each wrestling hotline. Finkel undoubtedly passed along our report and twice in the next week, a message was on my answering machine from WWF pay-per-view supervisor, Skip Desjardines. Prior to my reports from the cable operators, I had already been told Titan was claiming a 1.4 per cent buy-rate, which would have been up from 1993. No doubt, Desjardines wanted to dispute our report.

I said so on the hotline and announced we would hope to have the official estimate from *Multichannel News* the following Friday, which we did. The magazine's pay-per-view editor, Tom Umstead, is careful to estimate a range—not a precise figure—because the final totals are never in until 60 days after a pay-per-view. Either Desjardines, who may well be a nice guy, didn't hear our update or wasn't told of it because he called again to "touch base" about our estimates.

One may wonder why we don't merely accept the estimates of the two companies when they publicly release them. Simple: historically, both have exaggerated their figures. This dates all the way back to Titan claiming a 10 per cent buy-rate and a \$9 million gross from the first *Summer Slam* in 1988. The company didn't come close to that—yet, amazingly, *TV Guide* and *Sports Illustrated* blindly accepted their figures. The independent wrestling media did not, after checking with cable and pay-per-view sources who strongly disputed the Titan claims.

Even after reliable independent sources released a buy-rate estimate on *King-of-the-Ring* and *Bash-at-the-Beach*, Titan staffers have been insistent they drew nearly 100,000 more buys than WCW—a contention a broad consensus of the cable industry disputes.

The rule of thumb on pay-per-view: early estimates may be misleading, either high or low. Usually, two weeks are necessary to get a credible buy-rate forecast. And as independent journalists, we will continue to accept independent estimates for payable buy-rates—not company p.r. statements.

But isn't it interesting how concerned the big guys still are about what we write and say?

Steve Beverly

Syndication Declines

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In the past, wrestling analysts have been quick to cast ratings declines as cyclical. However, little evidence now exists to suggest a strong revival of quality stations and time periods for national wrestling programs—only the opposite. Several key reasons have developed—in addition to the gradual erosion of fan interest—for the meltdown:

1. In the last five years, substantial numbers of stations which have carried major mat shows have gained new, younger general managers who do not see wrestling as the key to their difficult time periods. Some have flatly turned thumbs down on wrestling and forced the shows to weaker alternative stations.
2. In addition, since the rapid resurgence of wrestling as a national entity in 1984, the emergence of Fox as a major league network player has reduced the number of available time slots on former independent stations. In addition, the new Warner Brothers and United Paramount networks, which launch early next year, will further reduce those availabilities.
3. Further, the explosion of high-budget action-adventure hours in syndication, which draw larger audiences and stronger demographics than wrestling, have eroded once-prized time periods. The numbers of those programs are only expected to increase in the coming seasons.
4. Saturday morning has become vulnerable on key stations because of implied government pressure for more child-friendly programs, of which wrestling does not qualify. Newer managers would rather schedule *Bill Nye the Science Guy* over Bret Hart if it means keeping Washington mandates off his back.
5. Weekend late-night time periods have become so competitive that wrestling rarely ever wins in the ratings in head-to-head program matchups, even in its once-assured safe haven. Late night could even be the next perilous slot for wrestling with more 2 a.m. and 3 a.m. slots the norm in big cities.
6. The profitability of infomercials for stations has made wrestling a non-viable entity on weekends in many markets, unless the big two companies compensate stations for carrying their shows. That—and terrible ratings—is largely what froze WCW out of a Saturday morning slot in Los Angeles. The Turner people pay compensation to stations in L.A., New York, San Francisco and Boston and may well be forced to buy the privilege of staying on existing stations in smaller markets, if rating levels do not increase.

What wrestling faces is not necessarily imminent but within the next two years, if the audiences remain stagnant or continue to decline, the companies may be forced to stop production on one or more of their syndicated series. In earlier years, the argument has been the "B" and "C" shows were necessary to boost the total gross rating for the mat packages. However, the *Spotlight* and *Main Event* shows have long been on life-support and *Wrestling Challenge* and *WCW Pro* are offered on far fewer stations than in their heydays, a primary reason why little of note ever happens on the WWF "B" show and the *Pro* show now airs on TBS before it does in syndication, hardly an attractive sales pitch for local station managers to take it. The expense of producing the shows for a skeleton station lineup would be virtually self-defeating.

WCW may well be touting its pay-per-view and *Clash* gains but the importation of Hogan has done nothing for its syndicated ratings. Part of a potential Hogan contract extension could include a clause requiring more in-

(Continued on next column)

Havoc Must Draw a 2: Bischoff

ATLANTA---Ordering a moratorium on "nine-to-five mentalities," World Championship Wrestling senior vice president Eric Bischoff has reportedly told staffers *Halloween Havoc* must draw a 2 per cent buy-rate.

Bischoff passed the word to the front office staff in meetings and a memo during the week of October 3 in the Atlanta office.

WCW insiders say pressure for the 2 buy-rate is coming from WCW president Bill Shaw, who is scrutinizing massive expenses for marketing, salaries for Hulk Hogan, and the payroll for announcers.

The 2 figure would require 480,000 buys, slightly fewer than twice the all-time record for a WCW show, recorded at July's *Bash-at-the-Beach*. Such buys would result in a \$12.5 million gross for the show, highest for any pay-per-view mat telecast this year, a total considered virtually impossible by most wrestling and cable analysts.

Bischoff reportedly told staffers they will be required to put in whatever overtime hours are necessary in the final two weeks leading up to the show, in order to ensure its success.

Shaw is said to be delaying negotiations for an extension of Hogan's WCW contract, which expires after the *Starrcade* show in December, until he sees the financial results of *Havoc*. Hogan is believed to be pushing for an extension immediately.

According to informed sources, even with the strong success of *Bash*, WCW will still face a \$3 million deficit for the current year if *Havoc* merely breaks even.

ring appearances on the *Worldwide* show—perhaps once a quarter. However, Hogan has not been inclined to work matches on syndicated television since 1987.

"If you really get down to it," says Padgett, "the best thing, in the long run, would be for wrestling to go away from syndicated television for a couple of years and then come back in a new format which would be fresh for station managers to consider. They can't keep going in the direction the last two years, in particular, they've been going and expect a miraculous revival this time."

Could the ratings decline of national shows spell a return to more local or territorial shows? Not likely, simply because stations not high on wrestling at present are not high on any wrestling, not merely the method of production or distribution.

The current state of affairs is probably a dilemma for the marketing departments of both Turner and Titan, which have groped for answers to the audience erosion for four years. Answers which may well be beyond a computer printout.



Slam Buy-Rate Around 1.25

NEW YORK—While final numbers will not be available until late October, estimates of the buy-rate for *Summer Slam* have been increased to 1.25 per cent, according to top cable operators.

The figure is slightly lower than claims of a 1.4 from the World Wrestling Federation but *Multichannel News* pay-per-view editor Tom Umstead estimates the final figure, based on key markets, will fall between 1.0 and 1.3.

First weekend reports had the show falling at an 0.9; however, top major northeastern and western markets swelled the figure. Estimates, based on an average \$29 cost are for a \$8.7 million gross, \$3.5 million of which will go to Titan Sports.

WCW Returns, Leaves in Australia

MELBOURNE, Australia—World Championship Wrestling's *WCW Worldwide* show has returned to television to Down Under viewers but will leave almost as quickly as it has reappeared.

The syndicated series returned Sept. 17 but will end a seven-week run Oct. 30, similar to a short run last winter, virtually killing proposed plans for a WCW Australian tour.

The show is not expected to return until next February. Australian network officials are editing the show to 32 minutes because of segments network censors deem unsuitable for children.

Flair Gets Plug On Monday Night

PITTSBURGH—Retirement may be imminent but Ric Flair still has the eye of at least one member of ABC's *Monday Night Football* team.

During the third quarter of the Houston-Pittsburgh game on ABC, Steeler Kevin Greene was shown making an aggressive wrestling-style tackle on an isolated slow-motion replay.

"Greene looked like he was getting ready for a wrestling match with Ric Flair," proclaimed analyst Dan Dierdorf.



BLAMING BISCHOFF NO ANSWER

Eric Bischoff has been excoriated in publications of late and on computer bulletin boards as few mat executives have since the days of Jim Herd. *Matwatch '94* certainly has been far from supportive of Bischoff's directions of World Championship Wrestling since he was named the creative chief and, ultimately, senior vice president of the company in the spring of 1993.

However, some of the calls for Bischoff's head, in the wake of the apparent decision to order Ric Flair's retirement—from a purely business standpoint—are clearly only from the emotional side of the loss of Flair and ignoring the big picture.

For the six years Ted Turner has owned WCW, Ric Flair has been either the standardbearer or the emotional leader of the organization in the minds of longtime hardcore NWA and early WCW-era fans. Even when Sting or Vader or some other performer held the world belt, Flair was still the hardcore champion. Even when Flair was in the WWF, he was still the WCW hardcore king.

To suggest the fall in WCW's fortunes over those six years is directly attributable to Flair is highly unfair. Mismarketing, internal politics and bickering, constant personnel and creative focus shifts and the ultimate natural erosion in fan interest experienced by both major organizations have all served to deteriorate WCW's financial standing.

However, to castigate Bischoff as a fool for backing Hogan for the company's future over Flair is ignoring the total picture, including prime rules of business. When Bischoff staked his own job and the company's fortunes—and perhaps its future existence—on the costs to bring in Hogan, he had no choice but to offer support for Hogan as the organization's top star—regardless of the pain it brings to veteran Flair fans. To do otherwise would have cast Bischoff as a worse bumbler than a certain chief executive in Washington. Whether Flair loyalists like the decision, at least the decision is a firm one as far as change of direction, unlike the lukewarm backing of Sting in 1990 or the misguided decision to make Ron Simmons champion in 1992.

Unfortunately, for Flair fans, the pain of losing their icon in this fashion is not what they bargained for when Hogan was imported earlier this year. However, to believe Flair could recapture the glory days of the early-to-mid 1980s as arguably the most popular star in wrestling is a romantic one.

As difficult as it is for the editor of *Matwatch '94* to believe, we are standing by Bischoff's decision—strictly from a business standpoint—to back the man he has spent millions of Turner's money on to redirect the company. Hogan is certainly not forever and unquestionably has proven not to be the role model his character has portrayed. Hulk is certainly not forever. However, he remains the most commercially successful property WCW could employ at the moment. And wrestling, after all, is still a business designed to produce a profit.

ON THE OTHER HAND....

Flair certainly deserves better than the assumed scenario on Oct. 23, if, indeed, we are not being played for the biggest con job in the history of pro wrestling.

Ideally, Flair would have spent 1994 running the table against a series of opponents in every pay-per-view and *Clash of the Champions* focused around the family man image he adopted last December. The culmination would have been with a gigantic retirement match at *Starrcade* with every major name in the business paying tribute to Flair and a sendoff comparable to that afforded Johnny Bench in baseball and Larry Bird in the NBA in their final seasons. Flair would have gone out a triumphant hero, rather than rag doll fodder for Hogan.

Accordingly, WCW owes Flair something. And not just the offer of a color analyst's job on television, which is not his strong suit. Articulate though Flair is, he is often too calm and dull at the color mike when out of character. Flair should also not be insulted with the offer of returning as a helpmate to Hogan months down the road.

Flair should be offered a responsible front-office job other than that of booker because Hogan will overrule any booker with whom he disagrees. The man clearly has the talent to be a quality public relations chief for this company. Further, on the air, after a few months of idle time to cool down from the heavy heel image, name the man "chairman of the board of directors of WCW," in a

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THE RATINGS PAGE

CABLE WRESTLING RATINGS

Sept. Avgs.	Rtg/Shr	Homes	Year Ago	Aug.
Mon. Night Raw	2.6/3.7	1.68 mil.	2.2/3.2	2.9/4.4
WCW Sat. Night	2.1/4.8	1.30 mil.	2.2/5.3	2.4/5.9
WCW Main Event	1.7/3.4	1.06 mil.	1.6/3.6	2.3/5.1
WWF All-American	1.5/3.9	933,000	2.1/5.6	1.6/5.0
WCW Pro*	1.3/5.2	818,000	1.6/6.9	1.3/5.6
WWF Mania	1.2/4.1	746,000	1.2/5.0	1.2/4.1

Week Ending Sept. 5	Rtg/Shr	Total Homes	Yr. Ago
WCW Sat. Night	2.3/5.6	1.42 million	1.9/5.0
WWF All-American	1.8/5.2	1.12 million	N/A
WCW Main Event	1.6/3.5	987,000	1.7/3.9
WCW Pro	1.5/6.1	926,000	1.6/6.9
WWF Mania	1.3/4.5	809,000	1.2/5.0

Week Ending Sept. 12

Mon. Night Raw	2.8/4.0	1.75 million	1.9/2.9
WCW Sat. Night	2.1/4.8	1.30 million	2.5/5.4
WCW Main Event	1.6/3.0	988,000	N/A
WWF All-American	1.3/3.6	809,000	N/A
WWF Mania	1.1/3.9	684,000	1.1/4.6
WCW Pro	1.1/4.5	678,000	1.5/6.6

Week Ending Sept. 19

Monday Night Raw	2.5/3.5	1.56 million	2.1/2.9
WCW Sat. Night	1.9/4.2	1.17 million	2.2/5.1
WCW Main Event	1.6/3.1	985,000	1.6/3.2
WWF All-American	1.4/3.6	871,000	1.9/5.3
WCW Pro	1.2/4.6	741,000	1.5/6.6
WWF Mania	1.1/3.7	685,000	1.4/6.0

Week Ending Sept. 26

Mon. Night Raw*	2.6/3.6	1.62 million	2.7/3.9
WCW Main Event*	2.1/3.9	1.31 million	1.6/3.6
WCW Sat. Night	2.1/4.6	1.30 million	2.4/5.7
WCW Pro	1.5/5.5	934,000	1.6/7.8
WWF All-American	1.5/4.0	933,000	2.3/5.9
WWF Mania	1.3/4.2	810,000	1.1/4.5

* Comparisons to last year's WCW Power Hour

** Live telecast

THE THIRD QUARTER

SHOW	RTG/SHR	HOMES	2ND Q	YR AGO
Mon. Night Raw	2.9/4.5	1.78 m	3.2/4.7	2.8/4.4
WCW Sat. Night	2.2/5.5	1.39 m	2.1/5.3	2.4/5.9
WCW Main Event	2.0/4.4	1.22 m	1.9/4.0	1.9/4.5
WWF All-American	1.7/5.1	1.04 m	1.7/5.1	2.2/6.4
WCW Pro Wrestling	1.3/5.5	802,000	1.5/5.9	1.4/6.4
WWF Mania	1.2/4.1	726,000	1.2/4.2	1.2/4.5

The July-to-September story is a mixed bag, particularly in year-to-year comparisons and to the spring quarter. Cable sampling is usually high, particularly in August when cable networks employ "stunt" programming to attract audiences opposite the networks' reruns.

We see continued annual growth in the WWF's flagship show; however, a slight erosion in August and tougher football competition in September have provided indication *Monday Night Raw* may well have reached a peak.

Raw jumped a slim four per cent over the summer of '93 but fell nine per cent from the 3.2 for its July-September run, which was spearheaded by three strong weeks with Jim Ross as host. However, *Raw* led in every one of the eleven weeks of the quarter and more than likely will eclipse its old mark of 27 consecutive weekly wins during October. By the end of the third quarter, *Raw* had reached a streak of 25 straight.

Hulk Hogan may have elevated big show ratings for WCW but not for *WCW Saturday Night* or *WCW Main Event*. The Saturday show actually tumbled eight per cent from its year-ago summer quarter, though the 1993 results were skewed by an unusually high 3.4 for a Flair-Sting bout. If September indications are a sample, college football will eat away at the Saturday results. In the spring, the Sunday *Main Event* had inched into third place, albeit with only a 1.9 rating. The third quarter showed a jump to a 2.0; however, a 2.7 and 2.1 for two live telecasts did little to help—the average rating never rose above 2.1 during the entire quarter.

The major story, however, continues to be the sharp decline of *WWF All-American*, which has been canceled, effective Oct. 23, for the new *Action Zone* (which sounds to be little more than a Titan version of *WCW Pro* or the first-year version of *Power Hour*). *All-American* dipped a whopping 23 per cent from its 1993 summer average of 2.2 and sank another six per cent from its 1994 second quarter. Cable sports competition and stronger movie fare from superstations in the Titan Sunday hour appear to be the crumbling blows and, at first glance, even a reformatted series shows little promise at regaining the old levels.

In the morning, *WCW Pro* was down seven per cent over last year's *WCW Power Hour* summer figures, fueling more speculation Gordon Solie may not continue on the series unless Ted Turner orders it. *Mania*, was flat from both the spring and last year, indicating a 1.2 may be as strong as possible.

THE SEPTEMBER STORY

Despite tough football competition, *Raw* actually outperformed last September by 18 per cent, largely because of a better promotion campaign when it returned from the U.S. Open tennis pre-emptions. However, the Dallas-Detroit overtime game and a lengthy Denver-Buffalo contest bled into substantial portions of the west coast *Raw* feed.

The rest of the news was largely grim. *Saturday Night* fell five per cent from a year ago and even the live late-month *Main Event* could only raise the TBS Sunday show to a 1.7. The *All-American* average was its lowest monthly mark in history, down 29 per cent from last September. *Pro* and *Mania* had little to celebrate, with *Pro* falling 25 per cent from last September's *Power Hour* outings and *Mania* staying flat.

Overall, the trends increasingly support the long-held theories of the bulk of the audience choosing one cable show per week for specific loyalties, with the others retaining only residual followings. Even the hype of live shows for TBS have not translated into massive ratings increases over a month or quarter.

900 MATWATCH

4 UPDATES EVERY SATURDAY

LATE-NIGHT SCOREBOARD
Show AT 10:30

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The Best of September

1. Joey Styles, ECW: "Cactus Jack is trying to inspire Mikey Whipwreck. He's no Knute Rockne." 2. Styles, ECW: "Mikey Whipwreck comes back with a board. It's like he's grown facial hair." 3. Jim Cornette, NWA Championship, to Joe Pedicino: "I knew you were in town because the Sara Lee bakery is open." 4. Cornette, NWA: "Pedicino, you look like you've had four spaghetti suppers at the Baptist church." 5. Cornette, WWF Superstars, to Smoking Gunns: "You've found it hard to get steady work since the Village People broke up." 6. Jerry Lawler, WWF: "If these kids (Gunns) are the future, I'd rather live in the past." 7. Bobby Heenan, Fall Brawl, on Steve Regal's powdered wig: "If Zsa Zsa Gabor had a wig like that, she'd be making more movies than she does now." 8. Tony Schiavone/Heenan, Fall Brawl: (TS) "Great crowd here in Roanoke." (BH) "We're not that far from Mayberry, are we?" 9. Heenan, FB: "Johnny B. Badd comes out dressed like a gumball machine." 10. Heenan, FB: "Harley Race is the Mike Ditka of wrestling."

11. Styles, ECW, on 911-Matt Osborne: "One clown down; Bischoff and McMahon to follow." 12. Randy Savage, Monday Night Raw: "I didn't think Lawler could jump to the second rope without a ladder." 13. Todd Pettengill, WWF Mania, on Lawler-Droese: "You've heard of Beauty and the Beast? This is Trash Man and Trash Talker." 14. Whipwreck, ECW: "I promised my mother I'd never win another title belt." 15. Cornette, NWA: "Pedicino, I knew you were in town. I noticed every buffet was closed." 16. Steve Rossi, Blackjack Brawl, after Tyler Maine bout: "And now for something different and exciting!" 17. Lawler, WWF Superstars: "Yokozuna could be the whole right side of the line for the Green Bay Packers." 18. Dusty Rhodes/Larry Zbyszko, WCW Pro: (LZ) "Bobby Eaton's always thinking two or three moves ahead." (DR) "What's he thinking about now, Larry?" (LZ) "About two or three moves ahead." 19. Tommy Rich, USWA: "Tommy Rich ain't no idiot." 20. Lawler, Superstars: "People have to take Immodium A-D after they listen to you, McMahon." 21. Ric Flair, WCW Main Event, to Dave Sullivan: "You're 100% Forrest Gump."

Strongest Comments

1. Heenan, FB, to Schiavone: "A friend in need is a pest—like you!" 2. Styles, ECW: "We have a real justice system in ECW. This isn't Long Island." 3. Scott Hudson, The Real Wrestling Hotline: "On an interview, Alex Wright makes Lance Storm sound like Paul E. Dangerously." 4. Steve Rossi, Blackjack Brawl, after Jack Armstrong vs. Mando Guerro: "Tell me now how fake wrestling is." 5. Anonymous, on Blackjack Brawl: "It would have to improve to be horrible."

And the Rest....

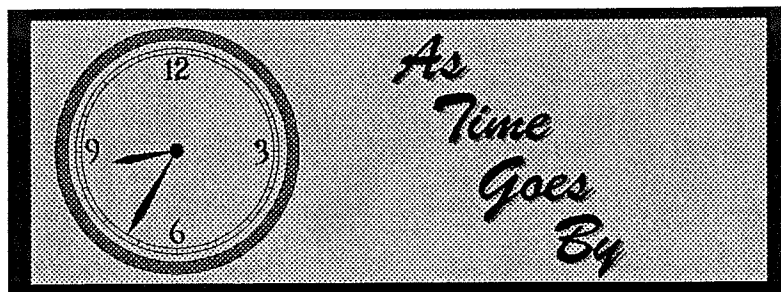
BEST SIGN - ECW, "Minnie Mouse Is Bischoff in Drag."

SAY WHAT? - Schiavone, FB: "We have two rings. We call them Ring 1 and Ring 2."

HYPE AWARD - Heenan, FB: "This is the best pay-per-view I've ever been involved with."

BLOOPER AWARD - Rhodes, Pro: "Johnny B. Badd's glutimus maximus is still hurting."

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The move of WWF shows in Chicago to late-night and wee-hours has to be a crippling blow. WFLD is trying a four-hour "action" block of *Superstars* at midnight Saturdays, *American Gladiators* at 1 a.m., *Wild West Showdown* at 2 and *WWF Challenge* at 3 a.m. but overnight ratings are not good....Jim Crockett's early NWA Championship situation has been rough. Despite positive talks in several markets, Crockett has just now cleared Raleigh, Charlotte and Miami for airing in November....The NWA Championship show was expected to be added in Atlanta in November....Crockett's sixth, seventh and eighth shows were wipeouts because of an audio problem on the announcers' mikes. He didn't learn of the snafu until two days before the fifth show aired....For you dish owners, American Independent Network, which runs a Monday-through-Thursday at 10 p.m. (ET) mat strip and ECW at 6 p.m. Sundays, has moved to Satcom F2R, Channel 17 through December, when it will move to Galaxy 6.

Jim Ross doing very well with a 9 a.m.-1 p.m. sportstalk slot Sundays on WGST in Atlanta. Don't be surprised to see Jim turn up on another pay-cable venture in the near future.... A pilot is reportedly being done for an action sports q-and-a game show, which will have some wrestling elements in it, for the new Game Show Network (debuting Dec. 1 on Galaxy 7 and available at the start to about a million cable homes)About the most charitable thing which can be said about *Blackjack Brawl* is it gave us Herb Abrams to laugh at again. Herb was reportedly paid \$50,000 by the MGM Grand Hotel and the Grand spent \$30,000 on promotion and still couldn't get more than about 400 fans to show. But comedian Steve Rossi as ring announcer? At least Herb could have gone for Rossi's old Larry Fine-hairstyled partner Marty Allen (the "Hello, Dere!" guy for you over 35 who remember him).

Tor Berg, formerly of LPWA fame, is trying to do a show at the Grand. Ironically, WCW was pitched the first opportunity to do the Las Vegas show and no one from the Turner front office ever returned the phone calls....Next month, we'll offer our second annual report card for television wrestling announcers, which—with this year's shifts—will take a decidedly different turn over previous years.

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Will Start Nov. 5

Crockett Gets Berth In Sportatorium

DALLAS—Veteran promoter Jim Crockett will move tapings of his new *NWA Championship Wrestling* to the Dallas Sportatorium Nov. 5 and expects to stage television on biweekly Saturdays.

Crockett, according to informed sources, has obtained a weekly slot on Dallas Fox affiliate TV27, effective Nov. 19. Reportedly, the situation is a cash deal, with Crockett paying the station \$1,000-per-week for the slot until January, when the time period will be a straight barter arrangement.

After taping eight shows in Chattanooga, the only market in which the program has aired, Crockett discovered his final three hours were unusable because of an audio problem, which may force him to repeat four weeks of shows until the Dallas debut.

Crockett has been offered the satellite time previously held by the now-defunct Global group to distribute his series but had not made a decision at deadline on that proposal.

Tentatively, Crockett plans to tape every other Saturday night with a likely break on Christmas Eve and New Year's Eve. The former executive producer of TBS wrestling is expected to use a number of the Texas performers who inhabited Global and the assorted Dallas-area independent groups with two to three fly-in performers per show.

In the last week, Crockett cleared television stations in Raleigh, Charlotte and Miami for the show and was expected to imminently announce a deal for an Atlanta outlet. However, Crockett lost a promised clearance on WCOV in Montgomery when station owner and former wrestling promoter David Woods decided at the last minute to stay with WCW.

If Crockett goes on satellite, he will reach 70 low-power, small-market independent and regional sports cable outlets.

Cactus Creates Nauseous Nonsense

ALPHARETTA, Ga. - Cactus Jack (Mick Foley) has hardly been idle or at a loss for creativity since leaving World Championship Wrestling. But his most recent escapade at a North Georgia Championship TV taping may be his most bizarre.

Cactus was wrestling Georgia indie performer Bodacious Blade when he decided to toss Blade into a garbage barrel into which fans had been tossing hot dog wrappers and spitting tobacco juice.

The stench was apparently so strong, it overcame Blade, who promptly crawled out and began regurgitating in front of ringsiders, much to their surprise and amusement.

Cactus, sensing the situation, patiently waited for Blade to finish his dilemma before allowing him to return to the ring. Upon which, Cactus promptly tossed Blade right back out of the ring squarely on top of his own vomit, again drawing huge laughter from front-row fans.

At deadline, North Georgia producer Sam Kent had not made a decision on whether to edit the sequence for Atlanta viewers.

Letters From Home

I never thought I would say this but WCW and Eric Bischoff have stooped so low, I wish they'd bring back Jim Herd. For any group to do what WCW is doing to Ric Flair insulting. Who do they think Hogan will draw with after it's all over against Flair?

Ed Morgan
Pittsburgh

Hulk Hogan is putting the WCW wrestlers in limbo, just like in the WWF. They're all being misused.

John Locker
Naunet, N.Y.

You are right about Hulk Hogan. Many NWA/WCW fans regard him as the heel in his confrontation with Ric Flair. Nothing Flair, or anyone else does, can change that.

John Murton
Chicago

Mr. Beverly, you are a wonderful professor and you have been a great mentor to me. But you are never going to discuss wrestling on my *Sportstalk* radio show, as long as I am the host. I can't believe you watch that.

Lee Nunamaker
Host, *Sportstalk*
WNWS-FM, Jackson, Tn.

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WCW Up, WWF Down in Early October Ratings

ATLANTA—The first week in October saw four of the six cable wrestling shows register declines over last year in the same week but World Championship Wrestling was up for its two prime series.

Monday Night Raw led for the 26th consecutive week in which it aired for its Oct. 3 episode. But *Raw* was down from last Oct. 4's 2.9/4.1. The first October Monday episode scored a 2.7/3.8.

WCW Saturday Night and *WCW Main Event* both registered substantial increases over the same year-ago weekend. *Saturday Night* only scored a 2.1/4.6 but was up 24 per cent from the same weekend in 1993. *Main Event*, at 1.9/3.4, was up 58 per cent over its disastrous 1.2/2.7 Oct. 3 of last year.

The rest of the WWF corps was also down. The canceled *All-American Wrestling* fell a full 33 per cent from last year to a 1.4/3.8. *Mania* dipped 18 per cent to a 1.1/3.5.

The two companies ended in a tie for the week with average ratings of 1.73, up from a perilous 1.5 a year ago for WCW and down from last year's 2.1 for the Titan shows.

They Said It!!!

(Continued from Page 6)

MONDAY NIGHT PLUG - Dan Dierdorf, NFL *Monday Night Football*, on Pittsburgh Steeler Kevin Greene: "He looks like he's getting ready for his next match with Ric Flair."

MISSY'S IMAGINATION AWARD - Missy Hyatt, *Sally Jessy Raphael*: "I've never dated a man who would appreciate me."

BOO AWARDS - 1. SMW, for over-the-line racial interviews by both the Gangstas and Rock & Roll Express over the "attorney-influenced" tag title change. This storyline isn't exactly burning up the woods and may be burning more bridges for SMW.

2. WWF, for its commercial with a Catholic priest hearing the confession of a WWF fan and suggesting viewers should "have faith" in the "New WWF Generation." If this were a parody of an ethnic group, people and writers would be screaming. But these same analysts don't find the problem with a lampoon of Christianity. To suggest faith in the WWF is on the same plane as faith in God is an insult to anyone of any Christian faith.

Matwatch Editorials

(Continued from Page 3)

capacity which gives Flair the ultimate last word in WCW decisions, even over "commissioner" Nick Bockwinkel.

Flair has made his enemies through the years but has achieved unqualified support of loyal, if smaller, legions than those owned by Hogan. If, in fact, this is the end of Flair's celebrated career with his traditional organization, it should be with more dignity than as a crushed loser.

WHEREFORE ART THOU, MISSY?

There once was a woman who was going to bring World Championship Wrestling to its knees over en masse cases of sexual harassment and discrimination. She attracted local publicity in Atlanta and even a spot on *A Current Affair*. A prominent wrestling writer even named names as alleged guilty parties who have never been legally accused either in a court filing or in an employment hearing.

Melissa (Missy Hyatt) Hiatt generated a brief firestorm of interest in her accusations, which were supposed to result in an Equal Employment Opportunity Commission hearing by the end of June. Hiatt was going to file mass lawsuits against several current and former WCW personalities, including possibly Ted Turner, himself. So far, nearly four months later, no hearing has been held and no lawsuit has been filed by Hiatt. Further, her Atlanta-based feminist attorney has been absolutely silent.

While the Turner wrestling organization is anything but angelic, so, too, in our view, is Hiatt. While some of her charges may have had validity, her credibility in bringing them sorely lacked, in the view of *Matwatch '94*. Her most recent appearance at the lackluster *Blackjack Brawl* in Las Vegas further confirms that.

The question which has never been answered: was Hiatt attempting merely to attract personal attention and headlines with her emotional story, or did she have a legitimate case? In our view, the longer time elapses, the more the indication the former is correct.

MATWATCH '94

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